



WHAT DOES
YOUR
VOTE WEIGH?

THE COUNTY UNIT SYSTEM IN GEORGIA

Vote November 7th!

The League Takes Its Stand

Defeat The County Unit Amendment

Danger!

You Can't Take It With You!

There Is More In The Land Than There Is In The Man

What Does YOUR Vote Weigh?

THE COUNTY UNIT SYSTEM IN GEORGIA

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For many years the county unit system in Georgia has been of paramount concern to the League of Women Voters of Georgia. In 1936—fourteen years ago—it was placed on the League study program, and in 1940 on its program for action, where it still remains. The action recommended is repeal of the county unit system.

The League is convinced that in a representative government the vote of one citizen should be equal to the vote of another. In Georgia, this principle is applied in the General Election, which is based on the popular vote; but not in the Democratic Primary, which is based on the county unit system. And since Georgia has but one political party, the Democratic Primary is for all practical purposes the real election.

Danger!

Now there is the possibility that the citizens of Georgia will be without equal voice in the General Election as well. The 1949 General Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment to make the county unit vote applicable to the General Election as well as the Primary. However, this amendment, as is true of all amendments to the Constitution, must be submitted to the voters for approval or rejection. It is to be voted on in the General Election in November. But how many are aware of this? How many have given serious thought and study to the county unit system and will really vote their convictions? Because too few have the facts at hand or have the time to get them, the League presents this pamphlet.

How Will The Amendment Be Presented?

On the ballots the amendment will be written in the affirmative first and then in the negative. The voters must read them both carefully. The affirmative reads:

“For electing and nominating by political parties, United States Senator, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the State School Superintendent, the Comptroller General, the Treasurer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, and the Commissioner of Labor, Justices of the Supreme Court, and Judges of the Court of Appeals, by the people, on a county unit basis.”

The negative will begin “Against election, etc.” as above.

VOTE THE NEGATIVE!

Just What is the County Unit System of Georgia?

Each county has twice as many unit votes as members in the State House of Representatives, and these are won by the candidates receiving a plurality of the votes in that county. At present this system applies in the Primary to candidates for state offices, the United States Senate, and in some districts, for the House of Representatives. The candidates receiving the most unit votes win the election; majority of unit votes needed for governor and senators; plurality for others.

In Georgia there is little relationship between the relative populations of the counties and the unit votes assigned them, the votes cast in some counties having far greater weight than those cast in others in a state election. Actually, in the 1948 primary, one vote in Chattahoochee was worth 122 in Fulton. Lesser inequities occurred throughout the State. For example: one vote in Towns had the weight of 5 in Dodge and 12 in Chatham; one vote in Echols had the weight of 6 in Tift and 11 in DeKalb. Some people think that the county unit system is like the electoral college, but it is not, for the electoral votes are apportioned to the states almost exactly in accordance with their populations and are reapportioned after each census to take care of population changes.

Because of the unit system the county in Georgia occupies a position of extraordinary importance as an election unit. Since Georgia is a one-party state, nomination is equivalent to election. Therefore, offices in Georgia are filled not by election by the people, but by counties.

The Neill Primary Act of 1917 established by law a system in which representation in the lower branch of the legislature is made the basis of the number of votes allowed a county in nominating candidates for state offices. Population has been given little consideration in the scheme of apportioning representation among the various counties in Georgia. However, abolishing the county unit system in elections would in no way change the number of representatives any county now has in the Georgia legislature.

There are 410 county unit votes representing the 159 counties. The 8 largest counties have 6 unit votes each. The next 30 counties have 4 unit votes. The remaining 121 counties have 2 unit votes.

<u>Number of Counties</u>	<u>Unit Votes</u>
8 times 6	48
30 times 4	120
121 times 2	242
<hr/> 159	<hr/> 410

A majority (206) of the total number of unit votes is necessary to elect.

In 1949 (Georgia Department of Public Health figures) the eight largest counties had a total population of 1,150,200, or 35.6% of the 3,225,000 total population of the state. Yet these 8 counties have only 48 unit votes or 11.7% of the 410 total. It requires more than 116 of the smaller counties to equal the 8 largest counties in population. Yet, these 116 counties have 232 unit votes, or more than one-half of the total number in the state.

Troupe County, for example, with a population of only 46,300, has the same number of unit votes as Fulton County with 471,000 inhabitants.

A few examples from the 1948 primary will show how unequal and unfair the system is:

Baldwin County.....	cast 4,658 votes for 4 units, representing 1,165 votes per unit
Bibb County.....	“ 19,012 “ “ 6 “ “ 3,169 “ “ “
Bulloch County.....	“ 6,232 “ “ 4 “ “ 1,558 “ “ “
Chatham County.....	“ 35,990 “ “ 6 “ “ 5,998 “ “ “
Chattahoochee County.....	“ 204 “ “ 2 “ “ 102 “ “ “

Clarke County.....	"	6,901	"	"	4	"	"	1,725	"	"	"
Colquitt County.....	"	6,850	"	"	4	"	"	1,712	"	"	"
DeKalb County.....	"	25,195	"	"	6	"	"	4,199	"	"	"
Dougherty County.....	"	6,548	"	"	4	"	"	1,637	"	"	"
Floyd County.....	"	12,719	"	"	6	"	"	2,120	"	"	"
Fulton County.....	"	74,823	"	"	6	"	"	12,471	"	"	"
Glynn County.....	"	6,433	"	"	4	"	"	1,608	"	"	"
Hall County.....	"	8,936	"	"	4	"	"	2,234	"	"	"
Muscogee County.....	"	14,626	"	"	6	"	"	2,438	"	"	"
Newton County.....	"	4,742	"	"	2	"	"	2,371	"	"	"
Polk County.....	"	6,045	"	"	4	"	"	1,511	"	"	"
Richmond County.....	"	14,017	"	"	6	"	"	2,336	"	"	"
Thomas County.....	"	6,674	"	"	4	"	"	1,669	"	"	"

There is more in the Land than there is in the Man

Geography as the basis of representation is deeply rooted in Georgia. In colonial days, Georgia was divided geographically for the election of members to the council as well as for administrative purposes. Population was secondary.

Geographical representation was definitely established for the election of members to the General Assembly in 1843 when 37 of the more populous counties were limited to two representatives, and the remaining counties to one. Such a law was enacted to prevent an excessive membership in the lower house, which had increased to more than 100 members.

The total number of representatives for the lower house was limited in 1849 for the first time to a specific number, 130, apportioned among the counties so that each county would have at least one, and the 37 more populous would be limited to 2 and NO MORE. These laws established the principle of geographical representation—land rather than people—as the basis for selecting state representatives.

While there had been these statutory limitations of the size of the House of Representatives, the constitution of 1868 established the first constitutional limitation, specifying the number of members should be 175. They were apportioned so that 6 of the most populous counties had 3 representatives each, the 31 next in population, 2 each, and the remaining 95 counties, 1 each. This 1868 model has been the pattern which has been followed with slight changes ever since. It is called the 3-2-1 plan, and has been included in every constitution since 1868. Twenty-nine more small counties were created between 1868 and 1925, thus stacking the cards more heavily against the large counties.

The fewer people a county has, the more powerful is each vote cast in it under the county unit system. The emphasis is on land rather than on the man in Georgia.

You Can't Take It With You

Yes, under the unit system, the franchise belongs to the land, not the people. If one person, or a hundred, or ten thousand people move from a 2-vote county to a 6-vote county, the land area of the smaller county will vote exactly as before; the vote of the larger county will not increase on iota. Remember—you can't take the weight of your vote with you.

During the period from 1880 to 1940, according to the 1940 census, the urban population of the state increased from 9.4 per cent to 34.4 per cent, while the rural population decreased from 90.6 per cent of the total population of the state to 65.6 per cent.

With the continued trend of population from small counties to large, increasing numbers of voters are being disfranchised by the unit system. Each census shows about a third of our counties growing, and more than a hundred shrinking. *Forty-one counties now have less population than they had in 1880, while the state population has doubled.*

In 1940 Chattahoochee County had 15,138 inhabitants; now, according to the latest Georgia Department of Health figures, it has about 1800. During this period the Federal government bought a large portion of the land in this county to enlarge Fort Benning. In spite of the fact that the area and population of Chattahoochee County were greatly reduced by this purchase, the number of county unit votes remained the same. In 1940 Glynn had 21,920, but since then it has increased to approximately 36,500. The number of county unit votes remains the same. The voting strength of the two land areas under the county unit system is still in the ratio of 1 to 2.

The 67 smallest counties combined have less population than Fulton, yet they have 134 votes to Fulton's 6. *However, comparisons of smallest with largest obscure the gross injustice suffered by citizens of many other counties.*

If unit votes were distributed in proportion to people instead of land, two unit votes should represent 15,730 people.* There are 103 counties below this figure, yet their 206 unit votes are sufficient to carry an election. These counties represent approximately a fourth of the population—and more than half of the voting power! Georgia has five counties with more than 100,000 citizens. These counties represent 29 per cent of the total population, yet their voting power is only 7.3 per cent.

Under this system it is entirely possible for counties having 26 per cent of the population of the state to carry an election with 206 unit votes. Thus the other counties with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the state's population, are in effect completely disfranchised. It is futile to figure that the vote of any citizen in any of them is worth 1/10 or 1/50 or 1/150 since for effective self-government it is worth nothing whatsoever.

Tear Down the Rural Urban Barrier Wall

Getting away from statistics and thinking more in terms of people—people you know and come in contact with daily—Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, wrote in his column of January 29, 1950: "More and more persons have left the country to come to the towns, large and small, in Georgia. Do these people then become unworthy or evil because they have moved to town? Our towns are filled with men and women who have left the farm and small towns to move to cities. Are they then no longer patriotic citizens of the State?"

"Is there any reason to be afraid of them?"

*Population 3,225,000 representing 410 unit votes—1949 Georgia Department of Health population estimate.

"Is there any valid reason why one man's vote in a small county should be worth as much as 22 votes in a county containing a large city?"

"More and more persons are sure to leave the rural districts as tractors replace mules and other machines make hand labor unnecessary. The population shift continues. Are we to ignore this fact and keep on giving excessive political power to courthouse cliques in small counties?"

Whether voters are rural or urban is not the question. It is a fact that in the small counties there are fewer people and small numbers are easier to manipulate than large numbers. V. O. Key, Jr., in a new book, *Southern Politics*, points out that in normal campaigns "a vote anywhere is a vote gained or lost . . . in Georgia every statewide campaign is made up of 159 separate races, one for the unit vote of each county."

Face the Facts

It is easy to see that a few votes in the small counties may determine which candidate receives the unit vote of that county. Again, as Mr. Key says, "two or three local politicians may be able to determine who wins the county plurality. . . ."

"The unit system thus requires that candidates deal with local patriarchs and also probably provides a stimulus for the construction of local rings and perhaps for electoral irregularities. Moreover, all these pressures tend to be concentrated on the 'close' counties. Campaign effort is concentrated within about one-third of the counties where there is a great premium on controlled blocks of votes. Whether such a block is under the thumb of a single official or subject to a courthouse ring or responsive to the behest of a leading citizen of economic and civic prominence, it can often supply the difference between victory and defeat."

Mr. Key says that a politician of wide experience said that he usually put about \$10,000 into the fifty or so doubtful counties on election day—though of course it is said that at times that much goes into a single county during the campaign period if there is a "hot" race.

This it seems that the hold of small county courthouse rings is as bad as any big city machine could be. There seems little reason to doubt that some counties can be bought and sold. One of the worst accusations is that some of these leaders secure a proprietary position over an entire county and its population. The people who fear big city machines might stop to think, for instance, that in Alabama, Birmingham does not run that state, and the same holds true with large cities in other southern states. Political problems in Georgia are much the same as in the other southern states, yet none of them use this electoral device. Indeed, Georgia is the *only* state in the Union to use this vastly unequal method.

What Worse Indictment?

The Georgia county unit system is undemocratic and immoral. It creates conditions of waste, inefficiency and corruption, and it undermines faith in government.

The system is undemocratic because it is government by land and not by men; it is immoral because it denies the basic equality of men. It creates waste, inefficiency and corruption because it relieves public officers of accountability to the people.

If democratic government is right, county unit government is wrong. If democratic government expresses the American ideal, county unit system subverts it. If democratic government is good government, county unit government is bad.

County unit government is based on a distrust of the people, the selfish interest of small groups and of those who do not wish to be elected by and accountable to all of the citizens of the state. The system removes the shield of the vote from the majority and places the spear of oppression in the hands of a minority. It is the negation of democracy and the enemy of equal justice.

In the minds of fair men and believers in democratic rule, the county unit system stands indicted and convicted for its violation of American ideals. Many have long contended that the county unit system is unconstitutional. They have based their opinion on the requirements of equal protection in the 14th amendment; popular election of senators in the 17th amendment; popular election of congressmen in Article I, Section 2, of the United States Constitution. Supporters of county unit rule argue that, valid or invalid, it is a political question outside the jurisdiction of the courts to decide. The constitutionality of this unique system of counting Georgia ballots has now been twice attacked in the Federal courts. Decision in the last case has just been handed down by the United States Supreme Court. While not ruling specifically on the constitutionality of the county unit system itself, the Court stated that "Federal courts consistently refuse to exercise their equity powers in cases posing political issues arising from a state's geographical distribution of electoral strength among its political subdivisions." Consequently, the uprooting of the county unit system in Georgia seems to be placed squarely on the shoulders of the people of this state.

Vote November 7!

Students of government are generally agreed that good government is more likely to become a reality where two parties are in existence. The injection of the county unit system in the General Election will close the door to a second party in Georgia. If the voters of Georgia vote for the amendment they are in reality voting to disfranchise themselves further.

A tremendous vote against the amendment is the immediate job at hand. From there the fight for repeal of the county unit system in the primary can continue. It is the only answer if Georgia is to make more honest elections possible and assure all eligible citizens an equal voice in their government. It is the only way that the counties paying the most taxes into the state treasury can have their fair say-so. It is the most important factor in getting able, well-equipped men to run for office—uncompromised by large campaign contributions, "trades," and promises. It is the only way that Georgia can obtain better government and the progressive leadership that could so easily become hers.

This is not a presidential year and normally the vote is light because there is no real opposition to the Democratic candidates. All citizens must become alert to the danger of the vicious amendment, which must be killed at the poll in November.

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